1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

cardamum fruit[10] at the time of harvest, and which some Lepchas hope will be converted into an elementary school. A little after this the track shoots sharply upwards, barely indicated by the presence of rocks and felled trees, running through poor and ragged stony ground sparsely sown with maize. The path leads directly to the crest of the hill which is surmounted by a small stone cairn or *choten*, perhaps three thousand feet above the river and five thousand above the sea-level. This cairn is almost opposite the junction of the Teesta and Talung rivers, and from it paths wander west and south, to the different villages of Zongu.

Proceeding westward from the cairn you reach in a couple of miles the small village of Panung; a couple more miles and you come to the village of Lingthem. Without our knowledge—we were only making for Zongu, and until the last hours believed that was the name of a village—it had been arranged that we were to stop there, and the first storey of the monastery had been placed at our disposal, in such a manner that it was almost impossible to refuse. As a place to live in the monastery suffered from several disadvantages; it was extremely cold and draughty, and fires were forbidden because the smoke would defile the images of the Gods; smoking was forbidden, except on the balcony which for my special benefit was temporarily considered outside holy precincts; the place was overrun with rats, which it would have been the greatest possible sin to kill in the monastery, and which could not be driven away supernaturally because none of the lamas knew the correct ritual, which involves the use of sand, ashes, and paper charms; there was never any privacy for at any time people might feel impelled to come to worship the images which were housed in this upper chamber, and regularly at dawn and sunset a young lama came to arrange the altars; and during big monastery feasts sleep was often impossible for two or three nights. But some of these disadvantages had compensating advantages; and as the focal centre of Lingthem, and to a lesser degree of the whole Talung side of Zongu, our living quarters were ideally situated for constant observation.

[10] Cardamum is the money crop of the Lepchas. Cardamum is a spice consisting of the seed-capsules of the perennial plants of a species of *Amomum* and is much used as a stomachic and condiment.

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has at least a couple of terraces and some considerably more. These terraces are scattered all over the valley, and it is rare for two contiguous strips to belong to the same owner. It is theoretically permissible to exchange plots so that they shall be better grouped, but nobody considers doing so.

The rice terraces are turned with a rough single-pointed wooden plough drawn by a pair of oxen, as is the *sing* or field-garden near the house. Except on these artificially levelled places the ground is too precipitous for the use of a plough to be possible. Two main crops are raised in the field-garden annually; first a mixture of barley and wheat, and subsequently maize. These grains are chiefly raised as stop-gap crops, and for fermenting; maize is thought little of, and to eat much of it is the surest sign of poverty. A number of fruits and vegetables are also raised on the edge of the field-garden to give a variety of flavourings to the main rice dish; the greater number of these are importations from India, such as various varieties of pulse, tomatoes and chilli; some of them however are wild plants found locally and domesticated; such are various lavatera, arums and alliums. The collection of some of these wild plants have some ritual attached to them; the allium *safyou* for example, which is only found in one place, must be dug up with sharpened sticks; if knives are used the supernatural Jamfi *moong* will be angry and throw sticks at the collectors and cause hail and thunder. Even more unpleasant is the mountain plant *chok-li bi* (probably a sort of rhubarb) which is said to be delicious; however you gather that plant hail will fall as the stems are picked.

Cardamum is grown in small clearings all over the lower slopes of the valley. It is a perennial plant propagated by cuttings which are taken in the early spring; the plant reaches its full bearing period within three years; at the end of ten years it starts to decline and new plantings have to be made; this can however be done on the same ground as the plant does not exhaust the soil. The plants need a good deal of care, and have to be hand-weeded at least three times a year, for the buds and fruit form close to the ground. When the fruit is gathered the old growth is cut down and burned. Cardamum plants are a favourite hiding-place for snakes. For the Lepchas cardamum is a foreign importation from Nepal; they always refer to it by its Nepali name—*elaiji*—and with the cultivation of the plant has come a whole complex of alien beliefs and ritual. Nothing is done when the

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'From that time Ginoo *moong pandi* and Linthem *anyou* destroy all those who are too prosperous or have too many children. That is the reason why you should never remark on a person's prosperity; for if Ginoo *moong* hears you they will lose everything.'

Ginoo *moong* still claims victims today. One of the latest was the wife of Ongden, one of the richest members of the community, unique in having six healthy sons. She was always grumbling, saying how poor she was and how little ground they had been able to sow; to which the neighbours would reply 'How greedy you are; you are really very prosperous.' Ginoo *moong* heard this talk, and so she died, while still young. It is also perhaps the fear of Ginoo *moong* which makes Lepchas so reluctant to say what their property is; it was practically the only subject on which people were secretive and unwilling to talk; most of the information I obtained on the subject I got from neighbours. The majority of the households are all on nearly the same economic level; four or five are somewhat above, and three below the average.

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The chief crops raised by the Lepchas on the Talung side of Zongu are wet rice, dry rice, buckwheat, maize, cardamum, and different varieties of millet or eleusine. On the warmer Teesta side a certain amount of sugar cane and manioc is also raised. The wet rice is naturally exclusively cultivated on the terraced fields, which are capable of being flooded. Seven different types of wet rice are recognised—two of them being suitable for cultivation on the higher terraces, while the other five need the warmer climate of the valley. Some of the richer people grow these five varieties in rotation, as this is believed to rest the soil, the variety sown depending on individual choice; in these cases the seed is not saved, but is bought each year, generally from Gangtok. The majority however only grow one variety and save their own seed.

In Lingthem wet rice has been introduced for less than twenty years, and in other villages even more recently; some places, especially on the far side of the Talung, where the natural water is less plentiful, do not grow it yet. When the Mandal first learned about this crop he had experimental terraces made for three years; it was then gradually adopted by the other villagers, as they became convinced of the superior yield of this crop, and the amount of terraced ground is increased annually. Almost every household

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249 cardamum is planted, but every year at the flowering time a sacrifice is performed in honour of the supernatural Elaiji-*nyou*, whom the Lepchas equate with Maknyam *moong*, the devil of death. When 177 they first planted cardamum they did no ceremonies, but they got ill; then a Lepcha from outside Zongu learned the proper ritual 249 from a Nepali Jhankri (these priests are somewhat similar to the Mun) and taught it to the Lepchas of Zongu. The rather elaborate ritual has two surprising features; it is only permitted for male Mun to officiate, and the chickens, one of which is given by each household, are hung by their feet while still living during the ceremony and only afterwards killed by a small boy who hits them on the head. Both of these features are unusual in Lepcha ritual; only for the sacrifices to *Thyak-dum* and in the hunting ritual, and a couple of new exorcisms divined in the last ten years are women Mun excluded; and in no other sacrifice at all that I know of are the sacrificial animals ill-treated or made uncomfortable before they are killed. It was also from this foreign source that [841] the Lepchas learned that the presence of menstruating women would blight the plant in flower; this is a completely alien idea, for otherwise menstruating women are paid no attention to. The Lepchas have modified this notion by saying that the plant dislikes [763] any strong smell; soap or excreta would have just the same effect; they will not accept the prevalent Hindu idea of women being essentially unclean.

243 The main crops of dry rice, millet and buckwheat are grown in the temporary fields. These consist of clearings made in the forest, or rather secondary growth, for one year, and then allowed to lie fallow for seven years before being cultivated again. Nowadays all suitable land is divided up into private holdings, the landmarks consisting of big trees or streams or stones set up at irregular intervals. On the whole these clearings are not isolated; three or more households have all their portions next to one another and travel round together every year. Related households do not usually have adjacent grounds; when the land was originally distributed care was taken, it would seem, that nobody should be especially favoured; and since then the hazards of death and inheritance and split families have assigned the present neighbours.

The clearing of the land is started in the early spring; the women cut down the lower growths with their sickles, while the men climb and lop the bigger trees and saplings. Until recently the trees used to be cut down if possible, but now there is a Court

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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The Mun Gongyop making an offering. He is assisted by his wife, who squats on the right. The object in the saucepan is a bamboo strainer, out of which she is ladling *chi* to refill the cup which Gongyop is holding.

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Tafoor "prescribing" for Chano's wife. Chano, on the left, appears to be somewhat doubtful of the issue; or perhaps he is wondering whether he can afford the necessary "treatment."

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A *Mung-Li*, or demon's house, on the edge of a cardamom field.

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House-building and general repairs are also carried out at these times. Cardamoms are perennial and are planted in March and April, being grown from cuttings. The plants bear in the third year, and are at their best in the fourth, fifth, and sixth years, after which they are rooted up. If raised from seed the plants take from seven to eight years to mature. The fields have to be constantly weeded, especially at flowering time, since the flowers are close to the ground. When the cardamoms are gathered the flowered stem is removed, but the leaves are left intact.

I do not know when cardamoms were introduced into Sikkim, but Hooker, a most observant traveller, and a botanist moreover, makes no mention of them. Their cultivation, however, is now of great economic importance all over the State; but this aspect of the subject will be dealt with later.

It is believed in Jongu that cardamoms were introduced from Nepal, although I understand that the plant is not cultivated in that country; and certainly I have never seen it in such parts of Eastern Nepal as I have visited.

Menstruating women may not go near the cardamom plants, especially when they are in flower; nor should anyone who has used strong-smelling soap approach them, for this is offensive to the flowers. For the same reason the cardamom fields should never be used as latrines. It may be noted that all over Nepal menstruation is intimately connected with certain kinds of cultivation. A woman in this state may not, for instance, approach pumpkins, chillies, cucumbers, or egg-plants, or they will rot away: if they have only reached the flowering stage they will not set. It is thought that the smell of menstrual blood causes the damage, and that no harm will ensue if the woman thoroughly washes her body before going near the plants. Apart from this no one should point a finger at ripening pumpkins or cucumbers: nor should one talk loudly in their presence, or they will certainly rot away.

All these ideas are known to the people of Lingtem, and may possibly have been introduced by Tempa, who lived

[i.e., during Oct., Nov. and Dec.--Analyst]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

249 177 amongst Nepalis for years. They are not, however, regarded, except in the case of cardamoms; and only then "because a wandering mendicant brought the first plants from Nepal, and these instructions were given with them."

249 778 Every cardamom field has a small erection in one corner. It is called *Mung Li* (Devil's house), and looks like a square beehive on legs. It is made for the accommodation of a devil called Thyok Dum, whose chief joy appears to be the destruction of cardamom plants. If given a house, however, he causes no damage.

Rice, *chi*, maize, meat and fish, together with a few coins, are placed in the house twice each year; just before the rice and barley harvests. These offerings remain in position until changed. Anyone who can read, but not a Lama, may place the offering in position; and with the exception of this particular person, no one should approach nearer than several yards to the *Mung Li* or he will be taken seriously ill. These erections are found only in cardamom fields; other crops being considered to have no need of such protection.

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[244] 773 It is believed that agriculture in general was introduced into Lingtem by the mythical inhabitants of Mayel, a place on the slopes of Kinchinjunga which it is no longer possible to reach. There are in Mayel seven men and seven women, who live in seven houses. They are children at dawn and old people at night; but they never grow older in years. They have, moreover, the peculiar property of being invisible, except during the first few hours of each day. They would seem also to have solved the problem of birth control, for no babies have ever been born in Mayel.

It is said in Lingtem that the people of Mayel built the Maharaja's original palace in Fyung-Di, the walls of which are still standing. When they had completed the work they started to return, going by way of the Teesta and Talung valleys, and were followed by the progenitors of the Lepcha tribe. The whole party went along quite happily until they